

Get A Grip on What the Bible says About The Church and Membership

Session 1

Sure... I Know What A Church is: Understanding the Nature of the Church According to Scripture

I. Misperceptions: What the Church is NOT

The word “church” often is used in ways that can confuse the biblical meaning which comes from the New Testament.

- A. The Church is Not a **Building** .
- B. The Church is Not a **Lifestyle** or **Action** .
- C. The Church is Not a **Denomination** .
- D. The Church is Not an **Authority Structure** .

II. Getting it Right: What the Church IS

Though the culture around us can get us confused about what the church is, the New Testament is consistent in the way it speaks about the church.

A. Matthew 16:18

1. Here Jesus tells us that He builds the church. He also tells us what he builds it **with** and what he builds it **upon** .
2. Jesus gives Simon a new name. Peter is a Greek word (*petros*) that means **“a stone”** , like a rock you could pick up or a single piece of cut stone for a building.
3. The word “rock” (upon which Jesus will build his church) is a slightly different Greek Word (*petra*) that means, **“a very large rock”** , like a huge boulder or a slab of rock.

Jesus says, “You are **a stone** (referring to Simon Peter), and upon this **very large stone** (referring to Himself) I will build my church.”

4. Jesus is saying that he will build his church **with Peter** as one of the building blocks. And he will build his church **upon himself** as the foundation stone.

B. 1 Peter 2:4-6

Peter remembered those words of Jesus. Nearly 30 years later, he told us how he understood Jesus' words.

1. In v. 4, Peter says that we, as Christians, come to Jesus, who is a Living Stone.
 - i. Jesus is a special kind of Living Stone. He is the "precious Cornerstone" (v. 6).
 - ii. Jesus is the foundation stone!
2. Then Peter says that we come as living stones ourselves.
 - i. We, as Christians are also a special kind of living stone. We are "being built up as a spiritual house."
 - ii. We, as Christians, are the building blocks. We are stones just like Peter was a stone.

So the church is something that Jesus is building, and it is made of the people (living stones) who believe in Jesus.

C. The word "Church"

1. The word used for "church" in the New Testament means, Assembly.
2. An assembly is a group of people.
3. In the New Testament, the church is a certain kind of assembly. It is an assembly of people who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.
 - i. The word "church" appears 77 times in the New Testament, and it always means, "people who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord."

Definition of the Church -- The people who have believed in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

III. The Universal Church and the Local Church

A. The Universal Church

1. Sometimes the word "church" refers to All People who have believed in Jesus, in all places, at all times.

i. **Ephesians 1:19-23** -- [I pray that you would know] the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. ^a*These are* in accordance with the working of the ^bstrength of His might ²⁰ which He brought about in Christ, when He ^araised Him from the dead and ^bseated Him at His right hand in ^cthe

heavenly *places*, ²¹ far **above** ^a**all rule** and authority and power and dominion, and **every** ^b**name** that is named, **not only in** ^c**this age but also in the one to come**. ²² And He ^aput **all things** in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as ^bhead over **all things** to **the church**, ²³ which is His ^abody, the ^bfullness of Him who ^cfills ^dall in all.

ii. **Ephesians 3:20-21** Now to Him who is ^bable to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, ^caccording to the power that works within us, ²¹ ^ato Him *be* the glory in **the church** and in Christ Jesus **to all generations** ¹**forever and ever**. Amen.

iii. **Ephesians 5:25** ^aHusbands, love your wives, just as **Christ also loved** **the church** and ^b**gave Himself up for her**,

2. The Universal Church is **invisible** and **intangible** this side of heaven.

B. The Local Church

1. Sometimes the word “church” refers to a local gathering of **Some People** who have believed in Jesus Christ. The local church is limited by place and time.
 - i. **Acts 11:22** -- News about new believers in the nearby town of Antioch is said to have “reached the ears of the church at Jerusalem.”
 - ii. **Acts 13:1** Now there were *at Antioch, in the church that was there*, prophets and teachers.
 - iii. **Acts 18:22** ² When he had landed *at Caesarea*, he went up and *greeted the church*
 - iv. **Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of *the church which is at Cenchrea*
 - v. **1 Corinthians 1:2** To the *church of God which is at Corinth*
 - vi. **1 Corinthians 16:19** The *churches of Asia* greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, with the *church that is in their house*.
2. These groups of some Christians who join together as followers of Christ in certain places, at certain times, are called “churches.” They are **local** churches.
 - i. The local church is the visible and tangible manifestation of the church.
 - ii. The New Testament gives a lot of instruction to local churches concerning conduct, belief, ministry, authority, accountability, and **membership**.

** Next week, we will be examining what the New Testament says about church membership. We will begin by looking at membership in the universal church. Then we will examine membership in the local church.